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Why is Truth and Reason Rejected? (2019-2020)

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Recommended Citation

Hourigan, Dina, "Why is Truth and Reason Rejected? (2019-2020)" (2019). *Analysis*. 1.
<https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/rhetdragonsanalysis/1>

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“Why Is Truth and Reason Rejected?” Dina Hourigan (analysis example)

Questions to Consider For Discussion and Reflection

In an analysis assignment, what is being analyzed (objects, texts, or artifacts) can be pretty straightforward: an essay, a song, a video game, a memorial, or a film are all examples of objects for analysis. But what if the object of your analysis turns out to be something a little bit more abstract—a predominant phenomenon playing out in the popular culture, for instance? In the age of “alternative facts” and “fake news,” Dina Hourigan’s look at objectivity (or the lack thereof) in the contemporary age is striking. As you read Hourigan’s essay, consider:

- How does Hourigan set up the context for the topic that she is exploring? What presumptions have to be made about the larger culture before setting out on this exploration of the contemporary climate of discourse? How might you identify a trend in the larger culture and use that as a springboard for in-depth analysis?
 - One of the forms that Hourigan’s analysis takes is that of a complex **synthesis**--that is, the combining of outside ideas to form a theory or system. What strategies do you see Hourigan employing in putting these three outside voices in conversation with each other? How does this method of synthesis benefit the larger analysis of the topic? What are the drawbacks or limitations associated with a synthesis-heavy analysis? What are the advantages? How might you utilize synthesis, as a rhetorical strategy, in pursuing an exploration of your own object of analysis?
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Why is Truth and Reason Rejected? by Dina Hourigan

In the modern era, knowledge has become further influenced by an individual’s personal feelings or opinions. There is belief that opinion overrides reason because despite the access of data, people choose to ignore logic based on their own thoughts and actions. In other words, we live in a world where individuals believe that their opinion is the only valid one. The source of rejection comes from the ideas of Keith Kahn-Harris, Nicholas Carr, and Tom Nichols, where each gather textual evidence or anecdotes to back up their claims related to the rejection of knowledge. Specifically, individuals refuse to accept the truth based on the ideas of denialism, the internet, and the “death of expertise.”

The rejection of truth can be rooted in the human tendencies of denialism. Denialism is a magnified and intense expansion of denial. Kahn-Harris goes on to explain that people use this form of rejection to fool others and themselves. For instance, a particular type of force that drives denialism is desire. Every individual has experienced some type of desire which gives humans something in common. The source of this desire usually comes from the want for something to not be true. For example, as humans we want to do the unacceptable, such as, murder, stealing, or destroying. However, people understand that it is morally wrong and because of that humans are forced to pretend that they do not want the things they secretly desire.

Denialism can also be seen as a way for people to prevent the challenge or acknowledgement of information they don't want to agree or be exposed to. This is where debunking comes into play with denialism. Debunking is the exposure of falseness in an idea or belief, unfortunately it does nothing to actually solve false accusations. In the article, Khan-Harris brings up the libel case against David Irving in 1996. Irving was a Holocaust denier and a falsifier to history. Despite the judgement that bankrupted him and lost him his reputation as a historian, Irving continued to make similar claims about history. False claims from people similar to Irving can be a serious issue in modern times. For instance, South African President, Thabo Mbeki, was wrongly influenced by a denialist who believed that there was not a link to HIV and AIDS. This accusation influenced the president to doubt the drugs needed to help patients suffering from these diseases. Unfortunately, his decision to believe the AIDS denialists cost him the lives of many people. Another example of the acceptance of untruths with little evidence is when there was a measles outbreak in Minnesota. Due to the refusal of parents to vaccinate their children because they were under the false assumption that it would cause autism the measles flared up again. This only further proves that denialism is imbedded in the minds of humans, influencing the rejection of truth and reason.

Technological developments have had an effect in the way we think and read, giving into the rejection of reason and truth. Research that once took days in libraries or in the stacks can now be achieved in just a few minutes by a simple web search. However, the advantages of such access, does not out weight the disadvantages. Marshall McLuhan, a media theorist, mentioned in his findings that the media supplies the information for ones thought, but it also shapes how one processes such thoughts. For instance, McLuhan shared that the internet has done nothing but decrease his ability to concentrate and contemplate. The fast pace distribution of information from the internet altered his mind into thinking it must take in the knowledge the same way he got it, fast and easy. McLuhan is not the only one experiencing such effects, individuals including Scott Karp and Bruce Friedman also have reported the negative outcomes of the internet. Both agree that their mental habits have changed and things as simply reading a book has become inconvenient in a world that focuses on convenience.

Although each of these individuals agree on the effects of the internet, anecdotes go only so far when trying to prove a point. Lucky, the University College London, published an online study where they were able to collect physical data that supports the claim that we are seeing a change in the way people think and read. The scholars were able to use two popular research websites to conduct their study. They noticed that those who visited the websites displayed "a form of skimming activity," where the visitors would go from one source to the next without returning to previous sources. The scholars also were able to see that no more than one or two pages of an article or book would be read before moving on to another. It is obvious that users are changing up the way they are reading online. However, this is not necessarily a good change. Maryanne Wolf, a developmental psychologist, shows concern towards the way the internet is putting "efficiency" and "immediacy" above everything. This results in the weakening of our mental capabilities to actually make deep and meaningful connections with the text we are reading. Earlier developments of technology made the internet seem like a blessing, but the more humans rely on computers to feed them information, our own intelligence disappears replacing it with artificial intelligence that takes away our voice of reason.

Equal rights do not mean equal talents or knowledge, however, whenever someone of expertise gives their educated opinion, an explosion of anger follows. The idea that every individual has

the right to their own opinion gives way to the rejection of expertise, or in other words truth. By choosing to ignore the professional knowledge of an expert you are rejecting the science and rationality behind it. However, that does not matter to layman who insist that everyone has a right to their own opinion no matter the situation. This idea can be further looked into by the Dunning-Kruger effect, where the dumber you are, the more you believe that you are in fact not dumb. The last thing you want to do when you are a victim to the effect is to come face to face with an expert who disagrees with you. As the individual you will do whatever you can to dismiss them to keep a high opinion of yourself. But by keeping this high opinion does not mean anything when the individual is rejecting real and important knowledge. All the person is doing is making arguments exhausting by asking for proof or evidence when they are not equipped to choose what is actually considered evidence. They also argue as if they are a research scientist which is one main way a conversation gets shut down between two individuals because there is the constant need to negotiate the rules of logic. Just because we live in a world where everyone has the freedom of speech, does not mean everyone's opinion counts for knowing something.

Through the ideas of Kahn-Harris, Carr, and Nichols, we are able to see the rejection of knowledge and the growth of opinionating. Where instead of relying on the knowledge of experts, people choose to look for logic in their own thoughts and opinions because they believe it is the only acceptable one. That even in the modern era where technology was supposed to help, only furthered people's beliefs that their opinion alone is the only one that matters. Based off the sources it's clear that people decided to ignore truth because of the internet, the "death of expertise," and denialism.

References

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